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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 13 July 2004, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Penjo (Vice-President) ..... (Bhutan)

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Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (*continued*)

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In the absence of Ms. Rasi, Mr. Penjo, Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (*continued*) (A/59/86-E/2004/69 and A/59/93-E/2004/74)

Panel discussion on field-level coordination for the purpose of continuing the presence and operations of United Nations humanitarian assistance missions in higher-risk environments

1. **The President** welcomed the panellists and announced that Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, would serve as moderator.

2. **Mr. Egeland** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), Moderator, said that the objective of the panel discussion was to examine how those involved in humanitarian activities could successfully address the unprecedented direct threats to their work in the field. In response to those threats, the United Nations had undertaken an extensive review of its security apparatus, which would be completed shortly. However, any action taken to implement the outcome of that review must strike a balance between two apparently contradictory imperatives, namely, the need for humanitarian workers to remain in high-risk environments in order to carry out their mandates and the need to take all necessary measures to protect those workers. In that connection, individuals working in the field were best placed to assess the level of risk, and increasing coordination between the different actors would strengthen risk-assessment capacities. In addition, closer collaboration must be pursued with host governments.

3. **Mr. Forster** (Vice-President, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)), Panellist, said that the complexity of current day crises, the dimensions of needs and the varying numbers and types of actors present had all made coordination among humanitarian organizations indispensable. The approach of the International Committee of the Red Cross to coordination was motivated by its desire to share experiences and harmonize efforts in order to increase complementarity and avoid duplication. In planning its activities, ICRC recognized the need to enhance, through dialogue, its knowledge of the approaches, policies and activities of other humanitarian actors. However, while committed to coordinating its activities with such actors, ICRC was not accountable to them. It needed to preserve its independence and neutrality in order to be unequivocally accepted by all parties to a conflict and thereby fulfil its mandate.

4. In view of the recent decline in the global security situation, ICRC had been forced to re-examine and adapt its analyses, policies and approaches in the field. The causes and characteristics of modern conflict environments were extremely diverse, and the renewed polarization of the global fight against terrorism, which opposed a number of State actors and radical non-State actors, had led to the undermining of the humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality, as many believed that it was impossible not to take sides. The difficulty of gaining access to the groups carrying out attacks against humanitarians posed another crucial security and operational challenge, since ICRC believed that sustained dialogue with all actors in a conflict situation was an indispensable prerequisite for achieving the required level of acceptance. Furthermore, humanitarian organizations were often perceived as being associated with the broader political and military agenda of the West or as being instrumentalized by belligerents. Such perceptions were reinforced by the blurring of mandates between the political and the humanitarian and the overlapping roles and objectives of military and humanitarian activities.

5. In order to respond to those challenges, ICRC had adopted a number of steps and policy approaches. First, and above all, it was committed to reaffirming the vital need for strictly impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian action, which, in practical terms, meant that that action had to be strictly consent-based, needs-based and non-discriminatory. It must also be non-militarized, because employing military means to gain access to affected populations would make humanitarians themselves a target by creating the perception that they were associated with a particular party to the conflict.

6. In that connection, ICRC took the view that it had become vital to explain more effectively why the principles of neutrality and independence were of increased relevance to humanitarian action. In any conflict situation, parties tended to reject humanitarian

actors suspected of having ulterior political motives, and therefore ICRC could not subscribe to the concept of integrated approaches, since they would combine political, military, reconstruction and humanitarian tools. It insisted on the need to respect the identity, mandate and operational approach of each individual actor. Nevertheless, ICRC maintained an active dialogue with the military, not least because they were primarily responsible for enforcing international humanitarian law. Coordination with the military was often indispensable in conflict situations and some circumstances might demand the presence of a military unit. However, ICRC wanted to avoid the current blurring of lines that had resulted from the characterization of military "hearts and minds" campaigns as humanitarian efforts, since the integration of humanitarian responses into an overall military strategy with the ultimate goal of defeating an opponent ran counter to the fundamental concept of humanitarian action.

7. With regard to security policy, ICRC had a highly decentralized management culture. Risk assessments were made primarily in the field on the basis of specific indicators, and responsibility for security lay with operational managers. It was convinced that security was inextricably linked to local population's perception of the humanitarian organization and to individual behaviour. However, in view of the changed global environment, ICRC must integrate into its security management system mechanisms for raising awareness and levels of preparedness in respect of dangers that might develop beyond a specific geographical context yet still affect staff working therein. It also needed to find new and appropriate means of communicating with the various parties in given situations, particularly those that might misunderstand or reject its efforts. In the face of certain acute security threats, ICRC had been compelled to temporarily limit some of its field operations and adapt its working methods. Nevertheless, it was maintaining a reduced presence on the ground in order to concentrate on key operational areas, such as the protection of civilians and detainees and emergency health and relief.

8. In conclusion, he reiterated the commitment of ICRC to pursuing increased coordination with all humanitarian actors and, to that end, welcomed the ongoing debate at the inter-agency level. In the light of the organization's paramount concern for maintaining space for independent and neutral humanitarian action, its coordination with other actors on the ground would depend not only on the specificities of each situation but also on the policies, methods and objectives of those actors. Their attitudes towards the principles of neutrality and independence would set the parameters determining the nature and extent of such coordination, which could not be regulated by general frameworks or directives.

9. **Ms. Russler** (Deputy United Nations Security Coordinator), Panellist, said that United Nations staff had been working in high-risk areas for many years. However, whereas in the past they had been afforded protection by the United Nations flag, recently they themselves, as representatives of the Organization, had become the target of attacks. The bombing in Baghdad and a number of subsequent published threats directed against the United Nations and its leaders had radically changed the security paradigm: the current threat level far exceeded the capacity of the existing system, and passive protection measures coupled with movement restriction procedures and reliance on the assistance of host governments were no longer adequate. Further steps must be taken to manage risk and reduce threats without limiting the Organization's access to populations in need.

10. In order to fully understand the operational environment, threat and risk assessment procedures were required. Such procedures must go hand in hand with programme planning and be based on a sound methodology. Minimum operating security standards (MOSS), which should be tailored to the specific needs of individual operations, were also critical to good security management: no staff member should be expected to serve in the field without prior security training in order to minimize risk. Resources for that training should be incorporated into the regular budget. Furthermore, without effective contingency planning, United Nations humanitarian workers became prisoners of events. In that context, it was essential to assess whether the benefits of programmes in high-risk areas outweighed the human cost. Lastly, ways must be found of improving outsiders' perceptions of the Organization, since United Nations humanitarian activities were not always viewed as neutral.

11. In conclusion, she said that the new threats facing the United Nations could be catastrophic. It was no longer acceptable to push the limits of security planning, as had been done in the past. The Secretary-

General had stated that the Organization's primary responsibility lay with its staff and level-headed planning would go a long way towards ensuring their protection.

12. **Mr. Morris** (Special Adviser to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)), Panellist, said that 80 per cent of field staff from the Office of UNHCR were working in the deep field, which was particularly dangerous. Cross-border refugee movements were often accompanied by the movement of weapons and combatants, which posed a threat to national peace and security and to the security and safety of international humanitarian workers. Although all UNHCR activities were informed by the need to remain neutral and impartial, parties to the conflict did not always perceive their efforts as such. The return of refugees to their country of origin was regarded by some factions as contrary to their political interests, particularly when destabilization and human displacement were the very purposes of the conflict.

13. In accordance with Security Council resolution 1296 (2000), the safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel to civilians in armed conflicts was of the utmost importance. UNHCR took the view that it had an obligation to come to the aid of affected populations and that all victims had the right to receive assistance. In that context, neutrality and impartiality were synonymous with independence and non-discrimination.

14. With regard to ensuring the security and safety of humanitarian staff, he noted that the bombing of United Nations headquarters in Baghdad had underlined the need to strike a balance between the humanitarian imperative and risk management. No absolute threat level existed: it was always dependent on the mandate of the mission in question and the resources available and, in that connection, UNHCR supported the concept of tailored responses to specific threats. A decentralized, "bottom-up" approach would also contribute to strengthening capacity at the field level and fostering better understanding among local populations of the work of the United Nations.

15. While it was necessary to improve the coherence of the United Nations system response to humanitarian crises by, inter alia, establishing a unified security management system incorporating a single chain of command, independence was critical to the humanitarian endeavour. Therefore, devolving authority to the field level would provide the scope to pursue a common objective in varying ways. As far as management accountability was concerned, apparent non-compliance with specific rules and procedures was often attributable to a lack of capacity at the field level. In order to rectify that situation, operational activities and security planning must be better integrated and field staff should be given training in threat and risk assessment. In that connection, Member States would recall that they had a responsibility to ensure that there were sufficient financial resources to implement MOSS.

16. **Mr. Gaylard** (United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia), Panellist, said that in any high-risk humanitarian relief operation, staff and managers must be well equipped and well informed in order to ensure safety and security in the field. They needed good vehicles and communications equipment, and had to be fully aware of what was happening around them if incidents, such as the kidnapping of a security officer in Somalia were to be avoided.

17. Turning to Somalia in particular, he described a situation of general and chronic insecurity. Although there were pockets of stability in the north and south of the country, militias operated everywhere and a gun-culture was pervasive. Militia groups sometimes served as public security forces in stable areas and were often in control in unstable areas. The need for humanitarian assistance and social services was acute. The only way the United Nations could function under such circumstances was to deal with everyone indiscriminately, from respectable elders and members of the administration to local warlords. Humanitarian access had to be carefully negotiated; once terms had been agreed upon, the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) conducted a safety assessment. All staff were expected to observe MOSS.

18. Somalia had shown that it was indeed possible to conduct humanitarian assistance operations in high-risk environments. Special arrangements had to be made to protect staff, safeguard valuable equipment, keep lines of communication open and minimize risks. To that end, experts had been recruited from Uganda to train the special protection forces, which were composed of Somali nationals who would later become part of the police force. The training and use of Somali staff and organizations was emphasized, not only as a security measure but also to assist capacity-building and lay the

ground for the future. International presence in the field was kept to a minimum. Good coordination among all actors was essential, and agencies needed to be flexible and to respond swiftly.

19. More funds were urgently required. Donations were increasing, but only 25 per cent of the total consolidated appeals funding had been received.

20. **Mr. Berteling** (Observer for the Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, emphasized that staff safety depended upon the management, not the avoidance, of risk. The European Union supported integrated missions and offered its help to the United Nations in attempts to deal with new security threats. Member States had a shared responsibility to ensure that any misunderstanding as to the humanity, neutrality and impartiality of assistance would be avoided. In conclusion, he asked whether ICRC might not lose certain advantages by not participating in integrated missions.

21. **Mr. Kuechle** (Germany) said that his country was generally in favour of integrated missions, considering them the most efficient way of delivering aid. While he understood that ICRC did not participate in such missions, he was interested to know how that organization viewed them from an objective standpoint.

22. **Mr. Cumberbach Miguén** (Cuba) endorsed the position of ICRC with respect to integrated missions. Accordingly, he wished to know the opinion of panel on the acceptability of recently launched unilateral military operations, and requested information about their impact on humanitarian operations.

23. **Mr. Lindvall** (Sweden), referring to Somalia, expressed his support for the policy of speaking to any leaders holding sway over civilian populations, whatever their reputation, and asked whether the United Nations as a whole supported that policy. He asked when the report on the future of the United Nations security system would be ready and whether a substantive debate would be held on the question.

24. **Mr. Backström** (Finland) asked whether it was still the case that loss of life was greater among humanitarian workers than among peacekeepers. He requested statistics, if available, on workers injured as opposed to killed, as well the number of United Nations personnel at risk worldwide. He was interested to know what conclusions could be drawn from such statistics for the future of humanitarian work. Finally, he wished to know if there were sufficient resources to guarantee the delivery of security in high-risk areas.

25. **Mr. Shimamori** (Japan) noted that all the members of the panel had spoken of neutrality and impartiality. He wished to know if they were discussing those principles in relation to the way humanitarian aid organizations were perceived by outsiders or from a conceptual standpoint. More specifically, he wished to know whether the security measures applied to the United Nations and to its implementing partners were the same.

26. **Mr. Simancas** (Observer for Mexico) asked what the Member States and the principal organs of the United Nations, especially the Council, could do to support the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

27. **Ms. Golberg** (Canada) asserted that the security of staff was the collective responsibility of Member States and stressed the need for political engagement in addressing impunity. Her Government supported the move to strengthen the unified security management system. When the functions of UNSECOORD were expanded, candidates' qualifications must be carefully considered so that the best people were hired. Integrated missions must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis; such a mission might be appropriate in one context but not another. When asked to take a decision on an integrated mission, Member States often did not know what guidance to give because they received conflicting advice from different parts of the system. She looked forward to the study to be conducted by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which would assist Member States in providing more consistent guidance. Further discussion was needed at the national and the international levels to achieve absolute clarity regarding the role of all actors in humanitarian operations. Finally, she requested more information regarding any strategies of the Red Cross Movement, the United Nations or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aimed at lessening the negative impact of media coverage on humanitarian activities.

28. **Ms. Russler** (Deputy United Nations Security Coordinator) in reply to the question from the representative of Sweden, said she believed that the report on the future of the security system would be

ready in time for consideration by the General Assembly at its next session. Beyond that, she had no information. She had no statistics immediately available to give to the representative of Finland. She understood that the higher death toll to which he had referred had been among civilian personnel, not just humanitarian workers. It would be difficult to attach numbers to personnel at risk; risk itself was unpredictable and could change abruptly, from day to day and from region to region.

29. She was very grateful to Member States for the support received but regretted that resources were insufficient. In reply to the observer for Mexico, she said that while impunity had not been a topic of the current discussion, it had been a cause for concern for many years: approximately 270 staff members had lost their lives since 1 January 1990, yet the perpetrators had been brought to justice in 22 instances only. Member States could play a very important role in tackling that problem. They could also ensure that security was taken into consideration, in financial as well as practical terms, in any mandate assigned to the United Nations. Agreeing with the representative of Canada with regard to the expansion of UNSECOORD, she requested assistance from Member States in finding highly qualified candidates to fill the posts.

30. **Mr. Forster** (Vice-President, International Committee of the Red Cross), Panellist, said that the goal of ICRC, like all humanitarian actors, was to gain access to victims of conflict by establishing a presence on the ground and to enforce the provisions of international humanitarian law. In order to achieve their aims, humanitarian actors must be known, understood and accepted by all parties. To avoid being seen as part of a wider agenda, humanitarian action must be independent and must be treated as isolated and distinct from other activities. Though certainly needed, other agendas, such as efforts to promote peace and reconciliation, would not be accepted by the parties to a conflict in the same way as humanitarian action, and ICRC therefore feared that the integrated approach could undermine the perceived neutrality of humanitarian operations.

31. While recognizing that there were no "one-size-fits-all" solutions in conflict situations, he took the view that a consistent, principled approach must be adopted and maintained. It was therefore difficult for ICRC to justify adopting one approach in one country, while adopting a different approach in another country. Consistency was all the more necessary in a world in which even groups with diverging interests communicated with each other in real time. To avoid creating misleading impressions about their motives, humanitarian organizations must keep their attitudes to communication open but also be careful not to take sides or make political comments.

32. **Mr. Morris** (Special Adviser to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), Panellist, said that, in view of the comments of delegations which feared that the Organization's use of integrated missions had brought it to a crossroads, it appeared that it was time for a neutral and impartial review of such missions. There was a complex relationship between the various domains of United Nations activity, including efforts to prevent conflict and efforts to address the needs of the victims of conflict. He believed that thought should be given to replacing the term "integrated", which caused problems by being imprecise and having negative connotations. He was also concerned at the implication that such missions placed more value on structure than on function, when, if anything, it was more accurate to describe them as "multifunction" than to describe them as "integrated". Any review of integrated missions should take care to avoid the risk of viewing United Nations peacekeeping operations as just another form of military undertaking or United Nations peace-building operations as just another form of political undertaking.

33. **Mr. Gaylard** (United Nations Resident Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia), Panellist, replying to questions, said that the concept of transparency, independence, neutrality and accountability was translated into action on the ground through a code of behaviour for staff. If correctly applied, that code of behaviour protected the rights of the recipients of assistance — in keeping with a rights-based approach — and protected the staff providing the assistance. On the question of the Organization's approach to relations with local leaders, he said that his own experience in Somalia, northern Iraq and the Sudan had confirmed that that approach did not vary from location to location.

34. **Mr. Dhakkar** (Observer for Somalia), addressing the principles of impartiality and neutrality of assistance, asked whether the Resident Coordinator for Somalia could specify what portion of humanitarian and development resources for Somalia had been allocated since 1991 to the north-west of Somalia, the

so-called Somaliland, to the north-east of Somalia, the so-called Puntland, and to the Sool and Sanaag regions. He also wondered whether there had been a review or evaluation during the same period to assess the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and development assistance. He noted that the Resident Coordinator had not spoken at all of the Transitional National Government established by the Arta (Djibouti) process in 2000 after a 12-year period without a central government.

35. **Mr. Egeland** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), Moderator, said that, according to his recollection, the Resident Coordinator had referred both to Somalia and to the Transitional National Government.

36. **Mr. Gaylard** (United Nations Resident/ Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia), Panellist, said that, although he could not supply precise figures, he could confirm that the north-west, which he had always been careful to refer to as the Somaliland region, had received the highest percentage of humanitarian and development assistance, with the Puntland region not far behind. Neither the United Nations nor the Transitional National Government had chosen that pattern of distribution: the explanation was rather that the central southern part of the country was very difficult to operate in. He felt sure that progress in the ongoing reconciliation process, in which the Transitional National Government was a very important partner, would enable the international community to re-engage in that area, particularly Mogadishu, which was destined to become the seat of the future federal Government.

37. The Sool and Sanaag regions, which abutted the Puntland and Somaliland regions, had been disputed for over a decade. The humanitarian situation there had become steadily worse in the previous four years, resulting in the loss of the livestock on which the pastoral population depended, and driving that population into the towns. They were receiving assistance from the local administration, the United Nations, ICRC and NGOs. In keeping with the usual principles of humanitarian assistance, the United Nations had maintained close contacts with the administrations of both Somaliland and Puntland to keep open its access to those in need, even though it was operating in an area actively disputed between those administrations. Although the efforts of the Organization, the Somali authorities and the international community had successfully brought short-term assistance with emergency water supplies and health care, the drought was continuing, and more assistance would be needed pending the next rains, which were due in six months.

38. As to distinctions between humanitarian assistance and development assistance, every country's situation was different. In the case of Somalia, the Organization tended to see the transition from humanitarian relief to rehabilitation to development not as a continuum, but as a package. Each assistance activity could therefore be seen as classifiable into any of those categories, depending on the context in which it was being viewed.

39. **Mr. Cumberbach Miguén** (Cuba) said that the panel had not yet answered his earlier question about the acceptability of recently launched unilateral military operations and their effect on humanitarian operations.

40. **Mr. Forster** (Vice-President, International Committee of the Red Cross), Panellist, apologized for having misunderstood the question of the representative of Cuba and said that he wished to emphasize two points. Firstly, ICRC never commented on the justification for any military intervention. It, and international humanitarian law, were concerned with how the law was observed in war rather than how the law was used to justify war. Secondly, in situations of conflict, ICRC examined the compliance with international humanitarian law of all the parties involved. In order to do so, it maintained a presence on the ground to monitor the situation of the individuals protected by that law, such as civilians and detainees, and also maintained a dialogue with the parties to the conflict to urge them to deal with any problems or violations.

41. **Mr. Cardoso** (Observer for Brazil) said that, in discussing high-risk environments, the debate had so far focused on security issues, but not on HIV/AIDS, which had been mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (E/2004/74) and which had a high prevalence in many areas with humanitarian workers. He wondered what could be done to improve the situation of persons living with HIV/AIDS in humanitarian crises and, more specifically, how field coordination

could be improved to ensure a comprehensive and combined response, including prevention, treatment and long-term care.

42. **Mr. Egeland** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), Moderator, said that the panel debate at the preceding meeting had discussed the multidimensional catastrophe facing many — mostly African — countries, which must deal simultaneously with HIV/AIDS, a crisis of governance, natural disaster and internal strife. That required a multidimensional response in which the United Nations country team, representing all the United Nations agencies and led by the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator, must work closely with NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, donors, neighbouring countries and whatever local, national and regional authorities existed on the ground.

43. **Mr. D'Antuono** (Italy), associating his delegation fully with the statement made on behalf of the European Union by the observer for the Netherlands, said that he wished to ask the Special Adviser to UNHCR to elaborate on the decentralization of decision-making and how that would affect staff security, and to ask the Deputy United Nations Security Coordinator her views on the same matter.

44. **Mr. Morris** (Special Adviser to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), Panellist, said that security for United Nations staff in the field must be handled in a balanced way. Although there were threats which could only be understood, analysed and dealt with at the global level, the best assessment of how to manage threats and risks was local and national, because accountability was improved by appropriate devolution of authority. Efforts must be made to render such devolved assessment more effective, however.

45. The United Nations and its agencies had much to learn from ICRC and NGOs, which drew less of a distinction between planning and implementation for operations and planning and implementation for the provision of security. The two fields must be better integrated.

46. **Ms. Russler** (Deputy United Nations Security Coordinator), Panellist, echoing the view expressed by Mr. Morris, said that the security management system of the United Nations was already highly decentralized. Risk assessments were performed by designated officials and security management teams at the field level; they made security recommendations to the Secretary-General. However, there was no question that the ability of individuals in the field to make such assessments must be improved with appropriate tools and training. There must also be a strong central source of policy and oversight, including an overview of global threats which might not be evident to teams on the ground.

47. **Mr. Egeland** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), Moderator, summarizing the debate, said that it had focused the attention of the Council on the need to cope with threats to humanitarian staff, as the most exposed and vulnerable members of any international operation. They had become soft-skinned and high-yield targets for ruthless groups of attackers. In 2004, 38 such staff had been killed in Afghanistan alone, and both there and elsewhere the main victims had been locally recruited staff.

48. The help of Member States would be needed to restore the status of the emblems and symbols which had protected humanitarian workers in the past. The present discussions had illustrated how the arrival of new actors in the field — commercial, political, military and security — had blurred traditional roles because they performed work very similar to that of humanitarian workers.

49. Integrated missions had become part of United Nations policy and could be found in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, and soon probably also in the Sudan. The Organization and the humanitarian agencies and their partners were discussing the nature of that integration, which, as one panellist (Mr. Morris) had pointed out, might benefit from being renamed. Despite the disagreements over integrated missions, the international community was aware that simply bandaging the wound would not suffice: the purpose of integrated missions was to move beyond the emergency stage and to address the building of peace, security and good governance.

50. He agreed with the conclusion of the representative of Canada that the security of humanitarian workers was not merely a matter for managers of humanitarian operations or for UNSECOORD, it was a collective responsibility. Political organizations, religious and cultural movements and the media throughout the world must

be aware of the need to protect unarmed humanitarian staff, who often worked alone and often crossed frontlines in conflicts.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.